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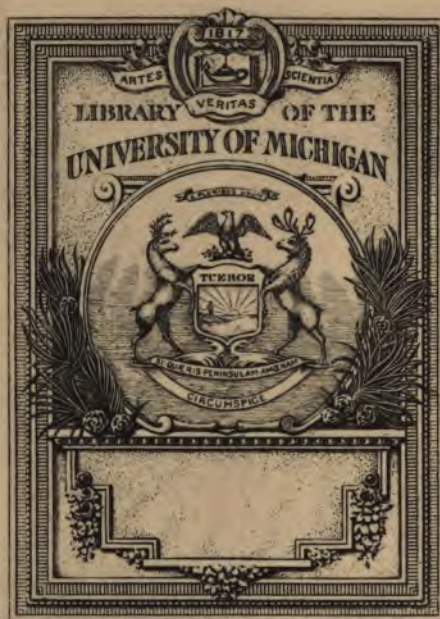
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BERNARD · SHAW
AS-ARTIST-PHILOSOPHER
BY RENÉE M. DEACON

Bernard Shaw as Artist-Philosopher.



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Bernard Shaw as Artist-Philosopher.

BERNARD SHAW
As Artist-Philosopher: An
Exposition of Shavianism
By Renée M. Deacon

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**His Word was in my heart as a burning fire
shut up in my bones, and I was weary with
forbearing, and I could not stay.**

Chapter I

Dramatic Theory

BERNARD SHAW, with eminently characteristic generosity, has given us several important clues to dramatic theory. These should be carefully studied by anyone who wishes to understand his views on dramatic art.

In the Preface to the Pleasant Plays he enunciates the law of conflict. "Unity, however desirable in political agitations, is fatal to drama, since every drama must be the artistic presentation of a conflict. The end may be reconciliation or destruction; or, as in life itself, there may be no end; but the conflict is indispensable: no conflict, no drama."

The dramatic value of conflict is supreme, because conflict, more than any other state, exposes character. Browning was fond of selecting for delineation "test moments," or crises in the lives of his

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characters, since he held that these moments most truly revealed the men and women of whom he wrote. But a test moment can supply only the climax of a drama. Sustained dramatic writing demands, besides these crises, steady and continuous conflict and interplay of character and emotion. It argues a weakness in Browning's dramatic genius that he so frequently isolated these test moments from their normal setting in the lives of his characters. Nevertheless, the idea which lay at the root of this emphasis of the test moment, namely, the supreme value of conflict in the exposition of character, was a true one.

We will select first for consideration conflict of a rather extreme type — that found in *The Devil's Disciple*. By means of this conflict the characters of Judith, Dick and Anderson are wholly revealed in less than two (dramatic) days. Discoveries are made in that short space of time which would have demanded the slow revelation of months or years in the ordinary course of events.

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Herein, then, lies the [dramatic value of conflict — in the rapid and complete exposition of character. The more acute the conflict, the more rapid and complete is the revelation.] ✓

The result is a manifold surprise for all concerned. The ne'er-do-weel, Richard, finds himself sacrificing his own life to save another man. When called upon to supply a reason for his action, he finds himself at a loss. "What I did last night," he tells Judith, "I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband, or for you as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and I cannot."

Anthony Anderson, the Presbyterian minister, finds himself also in a contradictory position. "I thought myself a decent minister of the gospel of peace; but when the hour of trial came to me, I found that it was my destiny to be a man of action,

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and that my place was amid the thunder of the captains and the shouting."

The test of Judith is of a different nature. One conceives of her, after it is over, as of a woman for whom all moral values are altered. For her, as for so many in the late nineteenth and even in the early twentieth century, names and labels had usurped the place of the spirit which they were intended to signify. [A man was either a good or a bad man, according as he subscribed or did not subscribe to current moral conventions. It never occurred to her to test these conventions by the side of the highest moral conceptions known to her soul.] Suddenly she is brought face to face with the Devil's Disciple (whom, in accordance with her code, she has conscientiously hated and dreaded) in the act of sacrificing his life to save her husband.

The result is twofold. First — O king of paradoxes! — she finds herself in love with this man, for one moment of blind intoxication with the heroism of the new life that is in him. And when this is over,

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and the last agony of the gallows has become like the memory of a fearful dream, one conceives of her, as I have said, in the quiet possession of these new values, these strange interpretations of the things of the soul.

The conflict in *The Devil's Disciple* is, as we have seen, a violent one. A more subtle example of the dramatic value of conflict is afforded by *Cæsar and Cleopatra*.

At the opening of the play, Cleopatra is a spoilt kitten, wont to encourage every whim, yet in abject submission to her Nurse Ftatateeta, who rules the Queen's Household with a rod of iron. At the end of the play she is a woman, who acts for good or evil on her own initiative, and pursues her aims without mercy.

"Cleopatra," says Pothinus, "you are changed."

"Do you speak with Cæsar every day for six months," she returns, "and *you* will be changed." And she continues: "When I was foolish, I did what I liked, except when Ftatateeta beat me; and even then I cheated her and did it by stealth. Now

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that Cæsar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done, and have no time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness." In this play character, and the conflict of character direct events, whereas in The Devil's Disciple conflict of events reveals character.

We may take as a second great principle of dramatic theory that given in the superb Preface to *Man and Superman*: it may be briefly summarized as [the repudiation of the absolute point of view.] Bernard Shaw says of his characters: "They are all right from their several points of view; and their points of view are, for the dramatic moment, mine also. This may puzzle the people who believe that there is such a thing as an absolutely right point of view, usually their own. It may seem to them that nobody who doubts this can be in a state of grace. However that may be, it is certainly true that nobody who agrees with them can possibly be a dramatist, or indeed anything else that turns upon a knowledge of mankind."

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During the period of dramatic creation the dramatist becomes identified with each of his characters in turn. As they are, so is he. The greater the dramatist, the more fully this identification becomes possible. Thus also it comes about that the philosopher-dramatist exercises the most god-like of all art-functions, because since he can comprehend the lives and purposes of many men, he must be himself either as great or greater than any of them, and his understanding of the universe above and beyond theirs. He is Superman,* that which is beyond man, and greater. That always seems to me a curious objection, which G. K. Chesterton has made to Bernard Shaw, to the effect that he does not represent "mankind." In all conscience, have we not "mankind" enough? And to what has it brought us, this mass of automatically working, living, loving, non-thinking humanity? To a social order which renders the name of civilization a

* It should be clearly understood, however, that the philosopher-dramatists hitherto have been "accidental Supermen" and not The Superman as anticipated in the Appendix to Man and Superman.

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mockery and a shame. Let us welcome a genius who can offer us something more than common humanity is able to do.

I have just stated that we may say of the Shavian characters in relation to Bernard Shaw himself that, "for the dramatic moment," as they are so is he. It will be seen that the proposition is equally true when reversed. "As he is, so they are." In the Preface to *The Sanity of Art* he gives us his clue to his characters. "As a dramatist I have no clue to any historical or other personage save that part of him which is also myself, and which may be nine-tenths of him or ninety-nine hundredths, as the case may be (if, indeed, I do not transcend the creature), but which, anyhow, is all that can ever come within my knowledge of his soul."

It is most interesting to consider the Shavian portraits from this standpoint. Taking into account the plays published up to the time of writing, *Tanner*, *Cæsar*, and *Andrew Undershaft* reveal the Shavian mind in the greatest degree. I do not mean for one moment that the resemblance is an

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affair of outward fact. But, in the case of Tanner for instance, the mould in which the man is cast is essentially Shavian: the Tanneresque method of grappling with life at close quarters, unsparing of strength and energy: of thinking of other people's necessities instead of his own or anybody else's "confounded principles," is eminently characteristic of Mr. Shaw himself.

In the Preface to *Man and Superman* it is stated that "Philosophically, Don Juan is a man . . . gifted enough to be exceptionally capable of distinguishing between good and evil." This point must be dwelt on, because it follows from it that Tanner (who is the philosophic Don Juan) is an incarnate challenge to the current standards of life and morality. That any advance in morals must be preceded by such a challenge is made clear in *The Sanity of Art*: "Every step in morals is made by challenging the validity of the existing conception of perfect propriety of conduct."

Finally, a last quotation from *Man and Superman* will illustrate supremely the precise quality of the Shavian temper. Thus

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Don Juan, bored to extinction in hell: "I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding."

Andrew Undershaft, although on the surface a very different person from Tanner, illustrates the Shavian mind in much the same way. They are at one, for example, on the question of [the fallibility of common judgment as regards right and wrong.] In a delightful passage, Lady Britomart discusses with her son her husband's weakness in this respect:—

"I really cannot bear an immoral man. I am not a Pharisee, I hope; and I should not have minded his merely *doing* wrong things: we are none of us perfect. But [your father didn't exactly *do* wrong things: he said them and thought them: that was what was so dreadful.] . . . You would all

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have grown up without principles, *without any knowledge of right and wrong*,* if he had been in the house." Compare with this a conversation between Stephen and his father in Act III with regard to the choice of a profession for the former. Stephen has repudiated any pretension to art or philosophy. His father's suggestions of "the army, the navy, the Church, the Bar," fail to rouse any interest in him. The following conversation ensues:—

UNDERSHAFT: Rather a difficult case, Stephen. Hardly anything left but the stage is there? [Stephen makes an impatient movement.] Well, come! Is there *anything* you know or care for?

STEPHEN [rising and looking at him steadily]: I know the difference between right and wrong.

UNDERSHAFT [hugely tickled]: You don't say so! What! no capacity for business, no knowledge of law, no sympathy with art, no pretension to philosophy; only a simple knowledge of the secret that has puzzled all the philosophers, baffled all the lawyers, muddled all the men of business, and ruined most of the artists: the secret of right and wrong. Why, man, you're a genius, a master of masters, a god! At twenty-four, too!

STEPHEN [keeping his temper with difficulty]:

* Italics are mine.—R. M. D.

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You are pleased to be facetious. I pretend to nothing more than any honorable English gentleman claims as his birthright. [He sits down angrily.]

Tanner, Cæsar, and Undershaft are all alike in one respect — they regard themselves as instruments of the Life Force, or, to use an older phrase, of the Divine Will. They exist, not for personal ends — ambition, happiness, and the like — but to fulfil a purpose which is infinitely greater than these. This point of view is essentially Shavian. So in the Preface to *Man and Superman*: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap, the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. And also the only real tragedy in life is the being used by personally minded men for purposes which you recognize to be base."

Andrew Undershaft's particular method of fulfilling the purpose of the Life Force

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is the direction of the cannon foundry: "the Undershaft inheritance." He does not regard this business as his own possession with which he may do as he pleases: he is rather possessed by it.

LADY BRITOMART: . . . To think of all that [indicating the town] being yours! and that you have kept it to yourself all these years!

UNDERSHAFT: It does not belong to me. I belong to it. It is the Undershaft inheritance.

Again, when Undershaft says that if Cusins succeeds to the foundry he must "keep the true faith of an Armorer," that is, "to give arms to all men who offer an honest price for them, without respect of persons or principles:" the following conversation ensues:—

CUSINS: I shall sell cannons to whom I please and refuse them to whom I please. So there!

UNDERSHAFT: From the moment when you become Andrew Undershaft, you will never do as you please again. Don't come here lusting for power, young man.

CUSINS: If power were my aim I should not come here for it. *You* have no power.

UNDERSHAFT: None of my own, certainly.

CUSINS: I have more power than you, more will. You do not drive this place: it drives you. And what drives the place?

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UNDERSHAFT [enigmatically]: A will of which I am a part.

The same principle — that of fulfilling the purpose of the Life Force — animates Cæsar's life. The great lesson which Cleopatra learns from him is that she must do, not what she likes, but "what must be done." "Now that Cæsar has made me wise," she says, "it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done. . . . That is not happiness; but it is greatness."

Cæsar does not make claims upon life: he recognizes instead that life lays claim to him. He gives utterance to this idea in a characteristic speech:—

RUFIO: Cæsar: I am loth to let you go to Rome without your shield. There are too many daggers there.

CÆSAR: It matters not: I shall finish my life's work on my way back; and then I shall have lived long enough.

The same point is very strikingly exemplified towards the close of Man and Superman.

TANNER: We do the world's will, not our own.
I have a frightful feeling that I shall let myself be

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married because it is the world's will that you should have a husband.

The idea which underlies all these passages is magnificently summed up in Act III of *Man and Superman*:—

DON JUAN: I tell you, gentlemen, if you can shew a man a piece of what he now calls God's work to do, and what he will later on call by many new names, you can make him entirely reckless of the consequences to himself personally.]

In the Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*, Bernard Shaw works out the thesis that "there can be no new drama without a new philosophy." He points out that "the writing of practicable stage plays does not present an infinite scope to human talent:" the summit of dramatic art "has been attained again and again." He cites *Lear* (tragedy), *Peer Gynt* (comedy), *Don Giovanni* (opera), the *Niblung's Ring* (music drama) in proof of this. Then in one sentence he reaches the heart of the problem: "It is the philosophy, the outlook on life, that changes, not the craft of the playwright."³

If men find themselves in opposition to

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the conceptions and ideals of life and conduct, which prevail in their generation, they must, if they write plays, write them "in terms of their own philosophy." For this reason "there can be no new drama without a new philosophy."

Again, a modern author cannot hope to surpass the art of Shakespear. What he can hope to do, is to say something which Shakespear did not say: something which, like Cæsar, "was not in Shakespear, nor in the epoch, now fast waning, which he inaugurated."

Chapter II

The Revolt Against Romance

SHAW speaks of Romance as the great heresy to be swept from Art and Life. It should be noted, however, that the word Romance as used by him in this connection may be properly understood to mean the degeneration of the Romantic idea.

For of the strangeness and the beauty and the wonder of Romance life is indeed full, and of it Bernard Shaw takes ample account in his plays. But he will have nothing to do with the false glamour which is cast over art and love by romance become degenerate. His plays from this point of view may be regarded as one continuous protest against the romantic view of love, culminating in Man and Superman. Shaw's point of view is above all things analytic. He is in the world but not of it. He has

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a godlike immunity from its preoccupation with itself: hence his attitude towards love is dispassionate, although his treatment of it never lacks passion. He refuses, like Tanner in *Man and Superman*, to be either "the slave of love or its dupe."

It is a great fallacy to infer from what has just been said that Bernard Shaw belittles love. On the contrary, he places it far higher in the universal scheme than do those who profess themselves its most ardent advocates. "How do you know," says Don Juan, "that love is not the greatest of all the relations? far too great to be a personal matter." *Man and Superman* illustrates this theme. Love between the sexes, considered from the external and analytic point of view, is Nature's device for the fulfilment of her great purpose — the continuance of the race. The man and woman are merely her agents. They are prompted and inspired by the Divine Will, or as Shaw would call it, the Life Force, to ends far transcending their own personal pleasure. Valentine describes the position of the lovers admirably in *You Never Can*

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Tell: "It's a curiously helpless sensation: isn't it? . . . as if Nature, after allowing us to belong to ourselves and do what we judged right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us — her two little children — by the scruffs of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves, for her own purposes, in her own way." Tanner expresses the same idea in the last great scene of *Man and Superman*: "We do the world's will, not our own. I have a frightful feeling that I shall let myself be married because it is the world's will that you should have a husband."

Another essentially anti-romantic point in Shaw's treatment of love is his theory that the initiative in the sex-relation comes from the woman instead of from the man. Not only does he work out this thesis in his own plays — primarily, of course, in *Man and Superman*, which together with *Getting Married* may be taken as his chief utterance on the subject of love — but he also shows how it underlies the plays of Shakespear. "In Shakespear's plays the

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woman always takes the initiative. In his problem plays and his popular plays alike the love interest is the interest of seeing the woman hunt the man down. She may do it by blandishment, like Rosalind, or by stratagem, like Mariana; but in every case the relation between the woman and the man is the same: she is the pursuer and contriver, he the pursued and disposed of." *

For the woman's justification, we must look to the closing scene of *Man and Superman*.

TANNER: [seizing her in his arms]: I love you. The Life Force enchants me: I have the whole world in my arms when I clasp you. But I am fighting for my freedom, for my honor, for my self, one and indivisible.

ANN: Your happiness will be worth them all.

TANNER: You would sell freedom and honor and self for happiness?

ANN: It will not be all happiness for me. Perhaps death.

[To further the purpose of the Life Force woman takes the supreme risk. She puts

* *Man and Superman*: Preface, p. xvi.

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her own life to the hazard, that she may create another life.]

Bernard Shaw has twice analysed the critical moment in the love encounter — the moment when the Life Force gains its point, so to speak. These two accounts are marvellously detailed and minute; they occur in *You Never Can Tell* (end of Act II) and in *Man and Superman* (end of Act IV).

The chief point to notice about the crises which are here analysed is that the woman's moment of weakness is the man's moment of strength. Throughout the man may be vacillating, reluctant, uncertain of his goal: the woman determined, single of purpose, unfaltering in aim. Curiously enough, at the supreme moment she falters on the threshold; and with divine economy of force the man suddenly plucks up courage and carries her over it. So in *You Never Can Tell*: Gloria has been comparatively at her ease with Valentine ever since their first meeting: he has been uneasy and restless, his excitement increasing as he is entangled more and more inextricably in the meshes

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of his love. Now comes the critical moment:—

VALENTINE [in an agony of restrained passion]: Oh, don't pity me. Your voice is tearing my heart to pieces. Let me alone, Gloria. You go down into the very depths of me, troubling and stirring me—I can't struggle with it—I can't tell you!

GLORIA [breaking down suddenly]: Oh, stop telling me what you feel: I can't bear it.

VALENTINE [springing up triumphantly, the agonised voice now solid, ringing, and jubilant]: Ah, it's come at last—my moment of courage. [He seizes her hands: she looks at him in terror.] *Our* moment of courage! [He draws her to him; kisses her with impetuous strength; and laughs boyishly]. Now you've done it, Gloria. It's all over: we're in love with one another. [She can only gasp at him.] But what a dragon you were! And how hideously afraid I was!

Romance in Shaw's plays depends on reality for its basis. He has "the philosopher's impatience to get to realities:" Reality, as he truly says, being the one thing which the majority of playgoers wish to escape from. That is because their own lives are so sordid that they despair of finding beauty, happiness, or Divinity in connection with the real world, and depart

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in search of them into "the fool's Paradise of popular romance."

To them Romance is a drug, an opiate: like the Oriental haschisch, which provides its victims with marvellous dreams. This conception of life and romance is at the opposite pole to that which we find in Shaw's plays. Here an ever-increasing consciousness of life is the ideal aimed at. Only by facing facts can we hope to redeem the world: and without the redemption of the world individual well-being is impossible: a man "must save the world's honor if he is to save his own." Bernard Shaw disposes of various fallacies in the dramatic treatment of love. He revolts against the modern idealization of love. Love can transfigure but cannot transform. "Love can't give any man new gifts. It can only heighten the gifts he was born with."

The lovers do not think one another perfect: they are keenly conscious, not only of beauty, but also of defect. Love persists and triumphs in spite of, not because of, the defect. No lover really loves

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his lady's faults. He loves the lady, and condones the faults for her sake: often, indeed, consciously deceives himself about them. Neither is love all-conquering, as we have been led to believe. Trifling difficulties in the path of love assume abnormal proportions.

In the light of this conception of love, based on reality and free from illusion, the cry of Mrs. George in *Getting Married* becomes simple of understanding: "Take me as I am, take me as I am." It is as if she said: "Take me as I am, because I have no power of changing myself: because I love you, and if you love me not, am lost: as I am, because I am destined for you, and only so can our destiny be fulfilled. Take me as I am, because you alone know what I am, and thus you alone are capable of evoking that which is latent in me."

Examples could be multiplied from the Plays of the "freedom from illusion" which characterizes love. In *Arms and the Man* it is precisely the true knowledge of herself which he displays that attracts Raina to Bluntschli.

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RAINA [wonderingly]: Do you know, you are the first man I ever met who did not take me seriously?

BLUNTSCHLI: You mean, don't you, that I am the first man that has ever taken you quite seriously?

RAINA: Yes, I suppose I *do* mean that.

In You Never Can Tell Valentine tells Gloria what he thinks of her without fear or favour — and advances his suit very materially thereby.

VALENTINE: You're a prig—a feminine prig: that's what *you* are.

If he had made love to her in the traditional fashion she would have disposed of him very quickly: he did make an attempt in that direction before he learnt to know wisdom, i.e. Gloria:

VALENTINE [pretending to forget himself]: How could that man have so beautiful a daughter!

GLORIA [taken aback for a moment: then answering him with polite but intentional contempt]: That seems to be an attempt at what is called a pretty speech. Let me say at once, Mr. Valentine, that pretty speeches make very sickly conversation.

The same freedom from illusion in the lover may be found in Widowers' Houses and The Philanderer. In Widowers'

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Houses Blanche makes an attempt to maintain ideal external relations between herself and her lover: but she breaks down lamentably: and when she and Trench finally make up their quarrel they do so with a clear knowledge of one another's weaknesses. In *The Philanderer* Julia does not try to conceal her faults from the man she loves; and Charteris, wishing to propitiate Grace, makes a feeble effort to conceal his, which she sees through at once. The dénouement is brought about by a clear understanding of each other on the part of all concerned, except in the case of Paramore, the inveterate idealist — whom we have always with us.

Man and Superman is the best proof of the case in point. In it we see Love, a potent force, moving inexorably to the accomplishment of its purpose, fully conscious — and this is all-important — of what it is doing. Neither Ann nor Tanner have any illusions about each other. Tanner expresses his opinion of Ann pretty frankly in his conversation with Mrs. Whitefield towards the end of the Fourth

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Act: but he may say what he pleases: we know very well that it makes no difference to his fundamental belief about Ann, to his certainty, amounting to absolute knowledge, that she is his destiny. He cannot be got to own more in her favour than that there is "a sort of fascination" about her. This is partly due to his temperament, partly to his restiveness under the imposition of the bonds of the Life Force. For he knows that from these bonds there is no escape.

ANN: Well, if you don't want to be married, you needn't be [she turns away from him and sits down, much at her ease].

TANNER [following her]: Does any man want to be hanged? Yet men let themselves be hanged without a struggle for life, though they could at least give the Chaplain a black eye. We do the world's will, not our own. I have a frightful feeling that I shall let myself be married because it is the world's will that you should have a husband.

The last two sentences sum up the whole question. The force which drew Tanner to Ann is the force which "holds together the Stars in their courses, and the atoms of the earth to their centre." It is the Life Force, and it knows no gainsaying.]

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Not only does Shaw deal with love considered intrinsically from a new point of view. In his plays he readjusts the dramatic relations between love and the world. When he began to write, love was regarded as the staple material of Drama. The love interest was supposed to be the one unfailing interest for old and young, and to this consideration all others were subordinate. In Shaw's plays love is presented to us, as we see it in life, in relation with other great issues. It is affected by a thousand complexities of thought and action, character and destiny. In a word, love occupies in the plays, as in life itself, a relative position.

Two examples may be noted of Shaw's protest against the sophistication of our consciousness by the idealization of love at all costs. In the one case he protests against the belittling of friendship between one man and another. This occurs in John Bull's Other Island.

NORA: You seem very fond of Tom, as you call him.

LARRY [the triviality going suddenly out of his voice]: Yes: I am fond of Tom.

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Later on the question recurs.

NORA: You care more for him than you ever did for me.

LARRY [with curt sincerity]: Yes of course I do: why should I tell you lies about it?

The other example occurs in *The Devil's Disciple*. Dick Dudgeon has taken Anthony Anderson's place and is about to be hanged as a rebel. Judith, Anderson's wife, believes herself to be in love with Dick, and tries to persuade him that he has saved her husband for her sake.

RICHARD: If I said—to please you—that I did what I did ever so little for your sake, I lied as men always lie to women. You know how much I have lived with worthless men—aye, and with worthless women too. Well, they could all rise to some sort of goodness and kindness when they were in love [the word love comes from him with true Puritan scorn]. That has taught me to set very little store by the goodness that only comes out red hot. What I did last night, I did in cold blood, caring not half so much for your husband, or [ruthlessly] for you [she droops, stricken] as I do for myself. I had no motive and no interest: all I can tell you is that when it came to the point whether I would take my neck out of the noose and put another man's into it, I could not do it. I don't know why not: I see myself as a fool for my pains; but I could not and I

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cannot. I have been brought up standing by the law of my own nature; and I may not go against it, gallows or no gallows. [She has slowly raised her head and is now looking full at him.] I should have done the same for any other man in the town, or any other man's wife.

In spite of all that has been said, some may still be found who will deny to Bernard Shaw any gift for producing purely romantic beauty. In answer I will give some examples of romantic beauty from the plays.

Take in the first place, the character of Eugene, in *Candida*, a character conceived and executed in the very spirit of romance. Think of the passage in which Eugene speaks, first of love, and of the dumbness of love, which is the world's tragedy; then of the ideal he desires for the woman he loves. What is this but romance, romance which is the life and soul of reality, not a vague dream conceived apart from life, but a vital aspiration growing out of life, part prayer, part ecstasy.

"I wish I could find a country to live in where the facts were not brutal and the dreams not unreal."

cf. "Don Juan in Hell" ³⁸

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Surely these words of Larry's, rising out of the deep places of his soul, afford the best answer to anyone who denies Shaw's power to conceive wonder and beauty. They are a prayer for the perfect reality. Read, too, Cæsar's speech before the Sphinx, Dubedat's dying speech in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and the trance speech of Mrs. George in *Getting Married*, if you would understand the work of Bernard Shaw from this — the romantic — point of view.

Chapter III

The Choice of Comedy

COMEDY, considered in its essence, represents the forces of life as opposed to the forces of death, the latter, in a greater or less degree, forming the subject of tragedy. When we speak of a tragic situation, we mean an impossible one, out of which there is no means of escape save death. Similarly, comedy plays the chief part in all those situations which are capable of furthering life in its various manifestations.

Anyone who has come thus far with me will agree that the subject with which Bernard Shaw is primarily concerned is always the same — namely, life.

DON JUAN: So would I enjoy the contemplation of that which interests me above all things: namely Life: the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself.

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Here Shaw defines the object of the Life Force as the attainment of consciousness. Hence it is not strange that he should set a high value on comedy, for in his Dramatic Opinions he gives us the following dictum: "The function of comedy is to dispel unconsciously by means of analysis."

A whole chapter could be written on the plays from this point of view alone. If you think of it, that is one of the greatest services which Bernard Shaw has rendered to his generation: "to dispel unconsciousness." A good half of the suffering and failure in the world is due to this state of unconsciousness which we are in. And those who rail at Shaw as an iconoclast forget that much of this very unconsciousness which he has done so much to dispel is due to an accumulation of traditional and conventional idealism out of which the spirit has passed, leaving the dry bones of form as so much hindrance to our progress in the future.

It is in this sense that he speaks of comedy as "the fine art of disillusion"—

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which, quite apart from his own plays, it certainly is. Go back to Shakespear, take Falstaff, the most comic figure in a world of comedy; out of what does the humour of Falstaff arise save out of the insight we get into his follies and weaknesses, by means of the searchlight of analysis, thrown on him by Shakespear? Out of the "fine art of disillusion" in fact.

Hence it may be said of Shavian drama as a whole that it is written in the comic (or life-giving) spirit.

George Meredith has spoken of "the uses of comedy in teaching the world to understand what ails it." The idea is a fine one. This healing effect of comedy is constantly to be seen at work in Bernard Shaw's plays. It is in this direction among others that he makes good his title to philosopher. For if he were simply an artist he might be content to present us with comedies in the vein of Mr. Somerset Maugham, whose witty and delightful plays have obtained so great a vogue. But Shaw has a purpose beyond any which Mr. Maugham has at present revealed to us.

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His pictures of "social follies" in the Pleasant Plays and of "social horrors" in the Unpleasant Plays are meant to do more than merely to amuse you. They are meant to rouse you to action, to fruitful thought, to availing resolution, that such things shall not remain as they are: that the social follies shall become less tolerable, and that the social horrors shall cease to be tolerable any more for ever.

"Life," says George Meredith, "is not a comedy, but something strangely mixed." Hence it is obvious that if drama truly holds the mirror up to Nature, it will, speaking quite seriously, present something which is "strangely mixed" also. As life grows more complex and varied century by century, owing to the ever-increasing consciousness of the human race, so the boundary lines of drama will shift and merge in a manner hitherto unknown. Probably quite simple plays, tragedies and comedies in the literal and old-established sense, will continue to be written and produced, for the benefit of a public which does not care to keep abreast of the most

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modern drama of its time. But behind all this mass of popular drama the classical drama will quietly grow in power, and will gradually come into its own.

Thus it is possible to meet calmly the outcry which is raised on every side with regard to the Shaw plays. Constantly one hears the comment: "Very witty and interesting; but it isn't drama, you know." Now the question is, what is drama? The answer is a simple one: it is one thing yesterday, and another thing to-morrow: and meanwhile, it is in a transition state, and it is simple waste of time and energy to speculate on what it will become. Bernard Shaw is nothing if he is not a pioneer; one who fearlessly crosses the old sacred frontiers of tragedy and comedy, and finds beyond a ground none the less sacred, because it is hitherto untraversed by the mind of man. Speaking of drama, he once said: "The end may be reconciliation or destruction; or, as in life itself, there may be no end." I have always thought that the sentence which I have italicised ought to receive particular emphasis in any consid-

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eration of Shavian form. All the plays illustrate the idea more or less. Spiritually, there is no final curtain in any of them. Take Major Barbara as an example. The thing is vital: you cannot conceive that it ceases to live when it vanishes from your sight. You can see Cusins arriving at six o'clock next morning, gently grumbling and whimsically pretending to rub his eyes at the early hour: you can see Barbara, with her eager, fervent face, going in and out of the model dwellings in the little white town. You know that Undershaft will labour to his life's end to fulfil the destiny he has revealed to you: and that Lady Britomart will continue to get her own excellent way with the utmost politeness and absence of consideration for other people's feelings. You can see Sarah and Cholly settling down to a fashionable existence in the West End, and hear an echo as their carriage rolls past you in the street, "You know there is a certain amount of tosh about ——"

One may also mention here the fact that there is no such thing as "poetic justice"

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in the Shaw plays. But there is vital justice: as a man sows, so does he reap, (which is quite a different thing). Man's destiny is fulfilled from within, it is not an external Force imposed on him from without. Hence in Shavian drama the neat ending, in which the wicked repent, and the good are justified, is not more common than in life. Writing in Tom Jones on modern comedy, Fielding describes the error into which the writers of his time have fallen: "their heroes generally are notorious rogues, and their heroines abandoned jades, during the first four acts; but in the fifth, the former become very worthy gentlemen, and the latter women of virtue and discretion." He adds, naively: "There is, indeed, no other reason to be assigned for it, than because the play is drawing to a conclusion." The whole fallacy which is involved here, and in the "happy ending" theory generally, is entirely ignored by Bernard Shaw. Take Widowers' Houses as an example. There you see the problem working out exactly as it would have done in life. Sartorius flour-

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ishes from first to last like a green bay tree. There is no repentance and no change of front. Throughout he puts his case with the utmost dexterity. When all his skill fails to hide the hell out of which his money is dragged, Trench's fear of losing £450 per annum (however obtained) plus the certainty of losing Blanche (Sartorius' daughter) proves quite too much for his outraged sense of justice, and he decides to "stand in." A less truthful dramatist would have given us Trench at bay, heroically declaiming on the sufferings of the poor, and a farewell scene with Blanche, in the "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more" vein.

Such situations may be very effective on the stage, but as a matter of fact they do not occur in life.

It is interesting to consider Shavian drama in the light of Meredith's Essay on Comedy. There are many points of contact. In the first place, Meredith insists on Comedy as a *social* art. He speaks of "Society, or that assemblage of minds whereof the Comic spirit has its origin."

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Now no dramatic author hitherto has insisted so strongly on the social side of life as Bernard Shaw. Take the plays from first to last; there is not one of them to which this principle may not be applied. The Pleasant Plays deal directly with social follies: The Unpleasant Plays, with social horrors. In Three Plays for Puritans the application is less literally obvious: but the Comic Spirit reigns supreme in them nevertheless. What else is at the root of the delightful contrast between Dick Dudgeon and his family in the inimitable scene at the reading of the Will? Cæsar and Cleopatra is an essentially comedic revel.

John Bull's Other Island carries the Social principle a step further and gives you the affairs of a whole nation, an entire type of social life, as the background to your scene. In Major Barbara Shaw goes back to *the* social problem — the problem of poverty — and deals with it in masterly fashion. There can be no more convincing proof of his essentially comedic outlook than that he is able to extract from the mass of sordid and tragic fact contained in the

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Prefaces, the transfiguration of Major Barbara which closes the play.

It is clear from what I have said that the following reproach, levelled by Meredith at English comedy, no longer holds good. He says: "Our English school has not clearly imagined Society; and of the mind hovering above congregated men and women, it has imagined nothing."

From the first, Bernard Shaw has "Clearly imagined society." He has observed and analysed our social order with unerring and unfaltering courage and accuracy.

I need only to refer here to the previous chapter on the Revolt against Romance to prove that Mr. Shaw agrees with Meredith in regarding the sentimentalism, i.e. the man who refuses to face facts, as one of the chief opponents of the Comic.

The question of woman's position in comedy is altogether fascinating. First of all I should say — taking the deeper aspect of the question first — that woman's relation with the Life Force and her strength of initiative in that relation are

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essentially comedic, although they often border on tragedy. Comedy means life, and Woman is by her very nature bound to further life. Take the following quotation from the Dream Act in *Man and Superman*:—

ANA: . . . Tell me: where can I find the Superman?

THE DEVIL: He is not yet created, Señora.

ANA: Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done. [Crossing herself devoutly] I believe in the Life to Come. [Crying to the Universe] A father — a father for the Superman!

Primarily and essentially, and without regard to special cases, woman's function in the universe is to create life and man's to nourish it. "That men should put nourishment first and women children first is, broadly speaking, the law of Nature and not the dictate of personal ambition." Further, Woman by her domestic labour is continually building up the forces in man and so continuing her original work. [This work of hers is further complicated and rendered delightful by the fact that where her affections are engaged she is also

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occupied in building up the man's heart and soul and repairing the ravages which the world makes upon his fortress.] Such a woman is to a man the Comedic Spirit, the Life-Giver — in a word, the Inspiration of the Life to Come.

In all these ways, therefore, Woman's function may be regarded as comedic. But consider the matter from a simpler point of view. Take the question of social intercourse. Meredith explains in his essay that "the poor voice allowed to women in German domestic life will account for the absence of comic dialogues reflecting upon life in that land." And he continues, speaking of the East, "where the veil is over women's faces, you cannot have society." Again later, "Where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty . . . there . . . pure comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions." There is no doubt that to the increasing social freedom of women in this country is due a large proportion of delightful

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comedy in the Shaw plays. [Without such freedom it is obvious, for instance, that the adventures of Major Barbara and the escapades of Lady Cicely, not to speak of what I once heard called the "disgraceful meanderings" of Ann, would have been impossible. Not only so, but the whole attitude towards women in these plays, the detailed way in which their personalities are revealed, as if it were pre-eminently worth while to reveal them; as if they were desirable beings in themselves, and not merely put into the world as means to an end, however noble — all this accounts for the unique charm and fascination exercised by these women over our imaginations. The prominent part played by women in Shaw's plays should also be noted. Here again the plays prove Meredith's thesis: "Comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense. The higher the Comedy, the more prominent the part they enjoy in it." Candida, Lady Cicely, Major Barbara, Mrs. George — to

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have reduced their influence by a hair's breadth would have been to have done untold wrong to the lives and destinies of men. I was once at a great meeting addressed by Mr. Shaw, at the end of which he was baited as usual by innumerable questioners, till at last a little woman rose far off in the gallery and asked, "What about the position of women?" There was the slightest possible touch of impatience in Mr. Shaw's voice as he replied that he really could not be expected to treat of that subject at such a late hour. When I listened to the trance speech of Mrs. George at the Haymarket Theatre, I knew that the little woman had got her reply.

With regard to the "sound sense" of women's wit in Comedy, the examples I have cited will serve excellently; but I should like to emphasize in particular the case of Lady Cicely Waynflete in Captain Brassbound's Conversion. Her wit may best be described in the words which Meredith has applied to Molière. "It is like a running brook, with innumerable fresh

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lights on it at every turn of the wood
. . . through which its business is to find
a way. . . . Without effort . . . it is full
of healing, the wit of good breeding, the
wit of wisdom."

Chapter IV

Dramatic Consciousness

"The truth is that dramatic invention is the first effort of man to become intellectually conscious."

TO Bernard Shaw consciousness is the first aim of life. He makes this clear in the third act of *Man and Superman*:—

"What made this brain of mine, do you think? . . . Not merely the need to do, but the need to know what I do, lest in my blind efforts to live I should be slaying myself." His own dramatic consciousness is extraordinary: its force and depth are unique in the annals of literature.

Consciousness is a late development of the world-spirit. In order to test this statement you have only to compare a Shakespearean play with a Shavian one. Take *Romeo and Juliet* beside *You Never Can Tell*. Both contain a love story. But

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you would do better to say of Romeo and Juliet that it is a love story. It is concerned with elemental passion, wholly instinctive, and therefore comparatively untroubled by the doubts, hopes, and fears of the conscious mind. Take Juliet's words to Romeo at the last dawn-parting:—

JULIET:

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree:
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO:

It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops:
I must begone and live, or stay and die.

This scene will never be surpassed as an exposition of love pure and simple. But to proffer such a scene as an exposition of love in the twentieth century would be as absurd as it is impossible.

Not its blank verse alone, but also its simple grandeur, its comparative immunity

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from preoccupation, its childlike faith belong to a bygone age.

There are eternal elements in love: an isolation from the rest of the world, the lovers being alone in a cosmos of their own: a faith which can move mountains, and is yet part wisdom, part folly: a force and directness seldom approached in life: an ecstasy, perhaps, never. But all these things assume a different colour under our modern conditions. The thoughts which assail Juliet (Act II, Sc. II) are simplicity itself compared with those which vex her counterpart to-day. The family feud: the fear of Romeo's death at the hands of her kinsmen: a touch of shame at the thought of her spoken word: these are the considerations which trouble her, and note that they are almost all external considerations. To-day the scene of drama has shifted from without to within the soul of man. Fears concerning family or kinsmen trouble the lovers less than the difficulties which arise within themselves.

Take Valentine and Gloria in *You Never Can Tell*. Gloria resents even her

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mother's interference on her behalf. "I cannot believe that anyone has any right even to think about things that concern me only." Now such a conception is utterly foreign to Juliet, because in her time the child was regarded as absolutely at the disposal of its parents, beneficent or otherwise — the child had no option in the matter.

The conception of the child as a separate individual with a destiny to achieve without coercion from parents or friends is of quite modern growth. Nevertheless the end is the same — in either case the child has its way. This is Juliet's: —

LADY CAPULET:

Marry, my child, early next Thursday morn,
The gallant, young, and noble gentleman,
The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church,
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.

JULIET:

Now by Saint Peter's Church, and Peter too,
He shall not make me there a joyful bride.

The next point to be considered with regard to the Shavian consciousness is the wide extent of its operation. For human consciousness not only intensifies

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with the centuries — its range also becomes greater. Shakespear was content to confine his literary expression of himself to his plays; for him there was no need to go further: his desire for conscious expression was satisfied thereby. With Mr. Shaw, on the contrary, there is a great and urgent need to go further — springing as I have shown from the great increase in human consciousness in every department of life since the Elizabethan era. This extension of the operation of conscious thought is to be found primarily in the Prefaces to the Plays.

These Prefaces are absolutely invaluable as storehouses of fact and thought. Scattered throughout, with the prodigality of genius, are ideas which will be expanded into tomes by the writers of the future, who will take the whole credit for their performances.

Literary criticism, philosophic criticism, criticism of art, life, and morals — all these are to be found in abundance and will amply repay study.

Above and beyond the Prefaces, how-

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ever, the increase of dramatic consciousness has left its mark on the plays themselves. Notice the description of each new character which precedes his or her entry. Take as an example the description of Andrew Undershaft in *Major Barbara*: —

“Andrew is, on the surface, a stoutish, easy-going elderly man, with kindly patient manners, and an engaging simplicity of character. But he has a watchful, deliberate, waiting, listening face, and formidable reserves of power, both bodily and mental, in his capacious chest and long head. His gentleness is partly that of a strong man who has learnt by experience that his natural grip hurts ordinary people unless he handles them very carefully, and partly the mellowness of age and success.”

There you have a characteristically Shavian exposition of the man, revealing at once his mental and physical qualities; giving a broad hint, too, of the Shavian faculty of calculating the power of the physical to reveal the mental.

Again, note the depth of Shavian consciousness. It is this very faculty of diving

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for and bringing to light the inner spiritual significance of men's lives which has led to much misunderstanding of the plays. Bernard Shaw's aim in each case has been to divine the heart and soul of the problem, to reveal the reality which underlies self-deception and pretence of every kind. So when he is most in earnest — as in the last act of *Man and Superman*, for example — he often seems to the casual observer to be joking, or worse, to be indulging in some wanton folly. Throughout *Man and Superman*, as regards the relations between Ann and Tanner, Shaw is translating instinct into act. It is mere foolishness to suppose that Ann's words in the fourth act, for instance, are intended to represent literally a conversation that would actually take place. But they are none the less true in spirit for all that. Bernard Shaw has found words for a silent instinct.

TANNER: I will not marry you. I will not marry you.

ANN: Oh, you will, you will.

TANNER: I tell you, no, no, no.

ANN: I tell you, yes, yes, yes.

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It is as well to bear this consideration in mind when thinking of the plays as a whole. There is a passage in the Quintessence of Ibsenism, which gives a very noteworthy key to the comprehension of Shavian drama. "Playwrights who formerly only compounded plays according to the received prescriptions for producing tears or laughter, are already taking their profession seriously to the full extent of their capacity, and venturing more and more to substitute the incidents and catastrophes of spiritual history for the swoons, surprises, discoveries, murders, duels, assassinations and intrigues which are the commonplaces of the theatre at present."

Remember that most illuminating phrase, "the incidents and catastrophes of spiritual history." It is with such incidents that Shavian drama is principally concerned.

The main distinction to be drawn between Shakespearean drama and Shavian drama is that the scene of action has shifted from the cosmos outside man to the cosmos within. The Elizabethans dealt primarily with man in his relations with the external

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world. They lived in a time when the physical counted for much, when life was fresh and eager and vigorous, when man's adventuring with the elements was a daring and a passionate thing. Man himself, as they conceived him, was a creature of amazing simplicity, full of warring passions, ambitions, dreams: but always alert, always alive, always looking ahead to the glorious possibilities of the unknown.

With the deepening consciousness of the race, man's consciousness of himself as revealed in literature has deepened too. Owing to the progress of science, mastery over the elements, over space and time, is so much nearer realization, that man is correspondingly freer to develop his spiritual energies. Hence he has become preoccupied with himself. Formerly the world was his workshop: now he finds this within his own soul. Just as former dramatic conflicts between good and evil are now replaced by the subtler conflict between good and a higher good still: so a like subtlety attends the change which decrees that whereas the older plays were full of

*Poor innocence
Jeer, Othello,
Moloch, Ham
Ghosts, etc*

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conflicts between men's bodies so the modern plays are full of conflicts between men's souls.* If this were fully realised we should hear less nonsense about the absence of action in Bernard Shaw's plays. There is plenty of action — but it is spiritual action, not physical; and the critics have not yet become accustomed to the change.

Out of this change of subject a change of form directly proceeds. "The soul is form and doth the body make." Whereas in Shakespear's Antony and Cleopatra, for example, you have five acts and a great number of scenes, some of them very short indeed: in Shaw's plays the tendency is increasingly to simplify the dramatic instrument.

It is true that in the majority of cases he retains the division into acts. Six of his published plays are written in three acts, five of them in four, and only one in five; so that in the matter of acts alone it will be seen that the process of simplification has gone far.

* Note the sign of this change afforded by the titles of modern plays: Waste: Strife: Misalliance.

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But he goes much farther than this. He discards the subdivision into scenes altogether. In this matter he is very much in advance of his time.

Considerable light is thrown on this subject by a statement in the Quintessence of Ibsenism: "The highest type of play is completely homogeneous, often consisting of a single very complex incident." It is well to bear this statement in mind, for example, when dealing with Shaw's latest play, *Getting Married*. The critics might have been prepared for the thunderbolt which is launched at conventional dramatic theory by this play, by the previous production of *Don Juan in Hell* at the Court Theatre. *Don Juan* forms the third act of *Man and Superman*, but as Shaw says in the Preface, it is "a totally extraneous act": it is quite able to stand alone on its own merits. Now in *Don Juan in Hell* the action is entirely spiritual. Shaw describes it thus: "My hero, enchanted by the air of the Sierra, has a dream in which his Mozartian ancestor appears and philosophizes at great length in a Shavio-

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Socratic dialogue with the lady, the statue, and the devil." It is quite obvious that for the purpose of such a dialogue change of scene is not only unnecessary but purposeless and distracting.

Getting Married is described by Bernard Shaw as a Conversation — it is not divided into acts and scenes. In an interview in the *Daily Telegraph*, which preceded the production of the play, he is reported to have spoken as follows: —

INTERVIEWER: Would it be indiscreet to ask you to lift a corner of the curtain prematurely, and give some notion of the plot of the play?

MR. SHAW: The play has no plot. Surely nobody expects a play by me to have a plot. I am a dramatic poet, not a plot-monger.

INTERVIEWER: But at least there is a story.

MR. SHAW: Not at all. If you look at any of the old editions of our classical plays, you will see that the description of the play is not called a plot or a story, but an argument. That exactly describes the material of my play. It is an argument — an argument lasting nearly three hours, and carried on with unflagging cerebration by twelve people and a beadle.

It is true that for the sake of *my* argument I have here considered two extreme examples; but the principle I have enun-

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ciated, namely, that Shavian drama is concerned with "the incidents and catastrophes of spiritual history," proves valid as regards the rest of the plays. This change in the subject-matter of drama corresponds to a subtle change in man's attitude towards himself. To-day it is an accepted fact that "man is his own star." In Elizabethan drama, the conception of Fate was always hovering in the background. A man's destiny pursued him relentlessly to the end — and his destiny was conceived as something outside himself, apart from himself, some doom alike irretrievable and irrevocable. It is true that Shakespear, since he had so great a part and lot in the "prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come," could cry with Cassius —

Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Still the world has hitherto replied, with
Brutus —

For this present,
I would not . . . Be any further mov'd.

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To-day man's thought concerning himself has changed; he sees that he is at all times master of his fate; and this imposes upon him an enormous responsibility, and an amount of activity hitherto unknown. He sees that instead of submitting to the Divine Will, he must fulfil it — so that instead of regarding his religion as an excuse for mere laziness he finds in it an incentive to the utmost exertion of his powers.

Major Barbara is an excellent example of a Shaw play considered from this standpoint. Major Barbara is a singularly courageous young woman who finds her spiritual nature unsatisfied by the ordinary life of Society. So she goes to the other extreme, and becomes a Major in the Salvation Army.

Here she is blissfully happy for a time, conscious that she has become merged in a wider life, in the fulfilment of a purpose which far transcends the petty preoccupations she has left behind her. But her happiness is short-lived. The Army is desperately in need of money: she finds

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that her millionaire father, Andrew Undershaft, maker of cannons, and Bodger, the distiller, are able to buy the army — i.e. to keep the Shelters open by their munificent contributions, in spite of the wickedness — from her point of view — of their several occupations. For a time she is plunged in despair: for the work of Bodger and Undershaft stands in her mind for “drunkenness and murder”; and the thought that through them the Army (which exists to fight them) should be saved is intolerable. Then she is taken to see her father’s cannon works, and finds a model city, with cleanliness and order everywhere, and a complete absence of the starvation, degradation and misery against which she has to strive at the Army shelter. As Undershaft says: “In your salvation shelter I saw poverty, misery, cold and hunger. You gave them bread and treacle and dreams of heaven. I give from thirty shillings a week to twelve thousand a year. They find their own dreams; but I look after the drainage.”

“It is cheap work converting starving

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men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other. I will undertake to convert West Ham to Mahometanism on the same terms. Try your hand on *my* men: their souls are hungry because their bodies are full."

Out of this experience Major Barbara learns her great lesson. By it her future is determined:—

BARBARA: My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. [She is transfigured.] I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women.

I have told the story of Major Barbara here because it is important to realize the sort of drama which may rightly be considered as "spiritual history." The play is the story of Barbara's soul: of her first faith, of its test by reality (always the Shavian test); of its failure and of the birth of the new passion which will inspire her henceforward.

It should be added that the word

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"spiritual" in the phrase "incidents and catastrophes of ~~spiritual history~~" has found a peculiarly literal application in this instance. In the other plays the conflicts may be more properly called intellectual or passionate, but all come under the broad classification of "spiritual history."

Chapter V

Philosophy of Life

IF I were asked to give the main tenet of Bernard Shaw's philosophy I should at once reply "the sanctity of life." It is upon this main foundation that his attitude towards man, and particularly towards man in his social relations, depends. A violence done to life — not to physical life alone, but also to mental and spiritual life (a kind of violence which is often, comparatively speaking, thought lightly of or ignored), is to him the unpardonable sin. We are here at the behest of the Life Force, to preserve and enhance to the fullest possible extent the flame of divinity which has been entrusted to our care.

It is for this reason that Shaw wishes to protect the artist against the forces of modern civilization which would pervert his art in order to feed the vanity and flatter the conceit of his audience. The

Philosophy of Life

mission of art in the world is to produce beauty and truth in such guise as to stimulate and engender fresh life in the beholder. The fact that the artist, while he is at work, may be conscious of nothing but the blind instinct to create, does not affect the issue in the least. L

Now it follows from this proposition that in the case of every work of art in which the artist has consciously violated his message in order to flatter his audience, an injury is done, first to himself, and secondly to every human being who comes in contact with his work. For just in so far as the message is violated, the work becomes, not an inspiration, but a lie. Adroitness and subtlety in the presentation of the message are quite another thing, at times essential — if the artist has no ambition to be stoned — and very often wise.

To return to the Shavian philosophy. You may trace the origin of Bernard Shaw's conviction of the sacredness of life back to that devotion of reality, which has been discussed in previous chapters. His whole desire is for the sanctification and further- ✓

Bernard Shaw

ance of the real. So in Act III of Man and Superman he defines Hell as "the home of the unreal and of the seekers for happiness," as "the only refuge from heaven, which is the home of the masters of reality, and from earth, which is the home of the slaves of reality."

Then we come to the crux of the whole matter. Life is defined as "the force that ever strives to attain greater power of contemplating itself." Throughout the evolutionary process "Life was driving at brains — at its darling object: an organ by which it can attain not only self-consciousness but self-understanding." Later on this brain power is more closely defined: "Life is evolving to-day a mind's eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims as at present."

It will be seen at once that this philosophy increases man's personal responsibility for the well-being of the world enormously. It says, in effect: "You must, to the ut-

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most extent of your power, seek to discover the Will of the Life Force (the Divine Will) and to fulfil it." It leaves no room for that old excuse for laziness, submission to the will of God. Instead, we are to *do* the will of God, which is a much more arduous proceeding.

up
age
It is for this reason that Shaw extols the philosopher and his function. "I sing . . . the philosophic man: he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means."

What place do Love and the Woman hold in this great philosophy? The highest. It is characteristic of Bernard Shaw that his view of woman is at once the most practical and the most transcendently spiritual. Woman holds the secret of being. Just as in the brain of man the consciousness of the race is being evolved and increased: so through the soul of woman Being, the great I Am, is given to the world. "I said, with the foolish philosopher, 'I think; therefore I am.'"

Bernard Shaw

It was Woman who taught me to say 'I am; therefore I think.' And also 'I would think more; therefore I must be more.' "

The great lesson which the world is learning to-day is that the purpose of Life cannot be achieved without the co-operation of man and woman. In order that we may rise to the heights of our destiny (heights which modern philosophy reveals or rather suggests as unthinkably great) man must take advantage of all the weapons which the Life Force has put within his power. And the greatest of these is Woman. Man does not at first think this. He thinks that his destiny may be achieved by himself alone. Destinies so achieved are likely to be very one-sided — to be characterised by brain-consciousness, and to lack being-consciousness.] The hardest thing Bernard Shaw has ever said of woman (Tanner's saying in Man and Superman: the greatest common measure of a man and a woman is not necessarily greater than the man's single measure) hardly affects the ques-

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tion, since he lacked the generosity to point out that the proposition is often equally true when reversed.

One of the greatest evils of the present day is the development of man at the expense of woman. Men forget that the woman who goes (or rather is sent) to the wall becomes the mother of children and that her weakness means further weakness in her sons. So to all those who urge the preservation and enlightenment of the race I would say "Look to your women folk: the men are able at this stage in their evolution to take care of themselves. Do not forget the inheritance of strength or weakness which the mother no less than the father bequeaths to her children."

In a memorable phrase Bernard Shaw expounds the educational value of the love-encounter to the persons concerned. "That moment introduced me for the first time to myself, and, through myself, to the world." It is only when you come into contact with a force stronger than yourself that you learn the measure of your own strength. When the Life Force

Bernard Shaw

takes two people "by the scruffs of their little necks," as Valentine says, and uses them in spite of themselves for a purpose above and beyond their own, then they find out for the first time their relative value in the universal scheme. Until that moment they have only known their personal value: they have used their individual judgment, have done as they thought fit: but now a greater power than they have hitherto known comes into their lives, and they begin to view themselves and the world in a new and broader light. It is at this point that Shaw introduces his great prophecy concerning the future of the race. The dwindling birth-rates, which are causing so much comment to-day, will be replaced by the "great central purpose of breeding the race, ay, breeding it to heights now deemed superhuman." It only remains to add that Bernard Shaw is already justified by the activities of the Eugenics Society.

We now reach the central point of the Shavian philosophy.

Philosophy of Life

"I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding." This is the principle which lies at the root of evolution. The terms in which it is expressed are eminently characteristic of the pioneer quality of the Shavian philosophy. It is a preparation for that which is to come.

Now it is just this central law which gives due proportion to all the other departments of life. This is the Spiritual Principle, which, among all the mutations which are constantly taking place, does "not change, nor falter, nor repent." Love, art, and religion may at times fail to console: this great purpose of the Life Force alone remains certain to encourage the soul of man.

After all, it is the principle which finds expression in the highest love, the most

Bernard Shaw

potent art, the most sincere religion. For these are all attempts to create the more beautiful thing. Nature, whose sole aim is to evolve the most perfect living creature, deliberately casts an atmosphere of illusion over her children. No lover has ever loved, no artist has ever worked, no devotee ever prayed with such passion before. So thinks every lover, every artist, every devotee. And by her works Nature is justified.

But observe that the purpose of the Life Force is the same throughout. Man is the object of all its endeavour. It does not care intrinsically for great painting or poetry or music, nor for the joy of lovers or the mysterious beauty of cathedrals: but it cares intensely for the fruit of all these things — the perfected soul of man. In order to obtain this result — in order, in the ages which are coming, to evolve the Superman — it urges on all human activity through its appointed channels, through "the unthinkable infinitude of time."

Here it is well to give Bernard Shaw's

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definition of the Philosopher's function. "The philosopher is in the grip of the Life Force. This Life Force says to him 'I have done a thousand wonderful things unconsciously by merely willing to live and following the line of least resistance: now I want to know myself and my destination, and choose my path; so I have made a special brain—a philosopher's brain—to grasp this knowledge for me as the husbandman's hand grasps the plough for me.'" The object of this knowledge on the part of the philosopher is "to be able to choose the line of greatest advantage instead of yielding in the direction of the least resistance." Then in a few words the whole case is magnificently summed up: "The philosopher is Nature's pilot . . . to be in hell is to drift; to be in heaven is to steer."

It is very significant that The Dream in Act III of Man and Superman should end on the note "woman." The significance would seem to be this: just as man learns from woman the secret of being-consciousness, so woman learns from man

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the secret of brain-consciousness. Woman is learning this lesson more and more perfectly every day.

There sounds a triumphant note of inspiration for the future of the race — for the united consciousness of brain and being — in the cry of Ana at the close of the dream: "A father — a father for the Superman!"

Chapter VI

Bernard Shaw and the World

WITH regard to all men of genius, before a fair estimate of their work can be obtained, there are certain preliminary remarks to be made, certain forces to be reckoned with at the outset, arising out of the very nature of the situation.

The man in the street sees the man of genius through a mist of prejudice, of conservatism, of ideas cherished on account of their very age. Now it is part of Nature's scheme of evolution that a certain proportion of the men of genius born into the world should be iconoclasts, men who prepare the way for the light to come. It is important to bear these facts in mind as we consider the relations between Bernard Shaw and the World.

Bernard Shaw

Much has been heard, since he leapt into fame, of the cynicism of Shaw. No greater mistake has ever been made with regard to a man of genius. Shaw's so-called cynicism is nothing more nor less than the outward effect of an intense desire to have no second best in any department of life. He sees the good in existing institutions as clearly as we do; he has said so over and over again. But he sees the mistakes too; and he knows that there is no rhyme nor reason in his wasting his intellectual capacity by telling us how well we have done, when he knows that if our faults are pointed out to us, we shall be enabled to do so much better. The whole question is one of economy. We have no time to waste. We are here for a little while in the sun, born with a spirit of almost infinite potency, and a body of pitiable weakness. He says to us: "Do not stay: do not rest: do not be satisfied: there is more ahead, unknown lands to which the spirit of man may attain, where he may become transfigured, glorified, one with God. All these mistakes, these wrongs, these fallings-back are keep-

Bernard Shaw and the World

ing you from the Land of Beatitude which is before you."

It has been said of Coleridge that "he hungered for eternity." It shall be said of Bernard Shaw that he so hungered for the infinite goodness of God that he dedicated his life to man's attainment thereto.

I intend in this chapter to deal with some of the favourite gibes which have been levelled at Shaw by men whose opinion deserves to carry considerable weight.

First, there are those who deny him any serious intention whatever. They refer you comprehensively to his wit, as if that were not only his chief, but his sole asset. If he states a truth which sounds to them different from the A B C of art and morals on which they have been brought up, they dub it a gay paradox and say it is "So like Shaw."

In reply to this I should like to say first, that in judging that Bernard Shaw would deal with any spiritual truth out of wanton wit they are reckoning without their man. No keener artistic conscience than his exists at the present time — few so keen.

Bernard Shaw

There is nothing of the doctrine of "art for art's sake" about him. "For art's sake alone," he says, "I would not face the toil of writing a single sentence." Take the simple test of superfluity. You constantly see the assertion that Shaw's plays are "all talk." It is inferred that he writes ad lib., so to speak. In a very limited sense this is perfectly true: the man's copiousness of thought and felicity of utterance are amazing. But the real test of his quality is, Can you leave anything out? Try: and you will find that serious injury to his main subject will result. It is all inevitable and essential; it all has a place and a purpose. For Shaw's work, like Whistler's, is not a matter of taste, but of knowledge.

But in these preliminary remarks we have not reached the heart of the matter. The answer to this criticism of Shaw, which says that he has no real point of view, lies deeper; and a careful study of his works will convince you that the truth is to be found at the very opposite pole. The fact that he is a dramatist has

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put people off the scent. There are two quotations from his works which should be studied side by side in this connection. One is a passage from the Preface to *Man and Superman*: "Not that I disclaim the fullest responsibility for his (Tanner's) opinions and for those of all my characters, pleasant and unpleasant. They are all right from their several points of view; and their points of view are, *for the dramatic moment*,* mine also."

I have taken this quotation first because it reveals to you the dramatic aspect of the Shavian mind. Couple with it the following from *The Sanity of Art*: "The notion that the great poet and artist can do no wrong is as mischievously erroneous as the notion that the King can do no wrong. . . . In my last play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, I recognized this by dramatizing a rascally genius, with the disquieting result that several highly intelligent and sensitive persons passionately defended him, on the ground, apparently, that high artistic faculty and an ardent artistic

* Italics are mine.—R. M. D.

Bernard Shaw

imagination entitle a man to be recklessly dishonest about money and recklessly selfish about women."

You will rightly infer from this last quotation that there is a Shavian point of view.*

At this point I shall take up again the much ridiculed comparison between Shaw and Shakespear, because much may be learnt from it in the present connection. Bernard Shaw claims that Shakespear "has left us no intellectually coherent drama"; and speaking elsewhere of Dickens and Shakespear, he says: "Their pregnant observations and demonstrations of life are not co-ordinated into any philosophy or religion."

Let us examine this charge against Shakespear. Is it true?

One thing at least is certain. If he had any message to give us, any inspiration of a constructive character, we are justified in looking for it in those plays which represent his ripest experience, his

* For further discussion of the case in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, see the *Sanity of Art*, pp. 12-13.

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most mature judgment — plays such as *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. What do we find there? These plays all close on the note of peace, of reconciliation, of calm after storm:—

Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please.

This is a very beautiful conception. But we must face the facts, and they clearly point to this: that for Shakespear there was no active looking forward, but only calm at the end. Bernard Shaw's wonderful revelation of "the prophetic Soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come" was not in his age, was not possible for his time. It is not for us to cavil at Shakespear because this is so; rather we should accept his magical bounty of truth and beauty in the frank and joyful spirit in which it is offered. What I wish to point out is that Shaw can offer us a further gift — not more comfort, but more courage. Throughout his work the discerning eye can see the signs of preparation. A great time is at hand. The old

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modes of life and thought are shifting, changing, giving place to new. And behind all the changes, as the motive power and inner cause of them all, lies the conception of the Superman. Towards this the evolution of woman's soul, through various channels but with its own peculiar and individual function, is assuredly moving.

This sense of a high judgment-seat behind Shaw's various dramatic pageantry is our surety and stand-by, our guarantee of his good faith. It is this which gives unity to his work — this consciousness of a message which he has been sent to deliver, and which appears over and over again under different aspects and in different forms. I have heard people grumble because, they said, Bernard Shaw had delivered his message and had nothing more to say. Apart from the fact that these people differed considerably as to the nature of the message he had already delivered, I would remind them that no man of genius ever has more than one message to deliver to the world. This

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message consists of a revelation to mankind of *his* conception of God and the Universe. According to his special faculty he may reveal this in terms of philosophy, or of the arts, or of both, as with Shaw. But this is his revelation, this is his function and service to his generation, which, as is universally known, and as has been proved once again in the case of Bernard Shaw, for the most part disdains his message.

Another question which one frequently hears debated is, Are Bernard Shaw's characters true to life? The difficulty which people find in recognizing the prototypes of his characters and situations around them in their daily life, arises mainly out of Shaw's analytical temperament. He sees men and women as a god from a distant sphere would see them, with their relative greatness and littleness marked out as clearly and relentlessly as the countries are marked on a map. He sees their souls; nothing is hidden from his piercing gaze. We wrap ourselves in our follies, we bolster up our fears, we hide beneath a

✓ very

Bernard Shaw

sturdy exterior, a shrinking heart; but we cannot deceive him; and presently we stand revealed, in all our futility and cowardice, in all our emptiness of heart and brain. I can imagine him echoing the words of the Revelation: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. . . . Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

I remember discussing *You Never Can Tell* with an extremely intelligent woman of my acquaintance, and referring to the famous love scene * between Valentine and Gloria, she said: "That's a funny sort of love scene." It was an absolutely honest remark: and it revealed to me in a flash the attitude of the general mind towards the Shavian expositions of these conflicts of soul. As I have discussed this particular scene elsewhere I will only say here that the "funny"—meaning extraordinary—character of this love scene arises entirely

* Close of Act II.

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from the fact that it is treated analytically. It is not a literal rendering of a love-crisis: it represents rather the mystic and inner truth of that passionate encounter. It is as if some spiritual reporter had been present, and had noted in his book, not what the lovers said with their lips, but what they felt in their souls. ✓

Over and over again I have tested Bernard Shaw's work — his insight into human character, and in particular, his revelation of Irish life and mind; and he has invariably triumphed. Independent testimony pours in from all sides to the same effect. A lady who had lived much in Ireland once assured me that she could lay her finger, so to speak, on all the Irish types described in John Bull's Other Island. Another lady, when the conversation was entirely independent of Shaw, paraphrased in simple prose Larry's great speech near the beginning of John Bull, her point being to prove that Irish character is the product of the Irish climate.*

* The speech referred to is the one beginning: "No, no: the climate is different."

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Once in a London club when the subject of discussion was whether Bernard Shaw's women characters were true to nature or not, I saw a man stand up to champion Mrs. George, surprised that no one had been found to bring her any tribute. The same man bore testimony to the truth-to-life-ness of Morell and Eugene in Candida. A friend of mine once said that he knew people who, if they were placed in the same situations as the characters in The Philanderer, would act in precisely the same way. I could cite many other examples, but these are enough to serve my present purpose.

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pt.*

The charges which in the nature of things are most frequently made against the pioneer are those which are most often brought against Shaw. It is, for instance, frequently stated that his philosophy is destructive rather than constructive, and this is regarded as a defect in him. This charge is only in part true, and in so far as it is true it should be regarded as a virtue and not as a defect.

Go to his works first (not, as is so often done, to the remarks made by his accusers),

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and after reading them, ask yourself if the charge is a true one. Can you honestly say, after a perusal of *Man and Superman*, for example, that his philosophy is destructive? No more constructive philosophy was ever offered to mankind. The play teems with positive inspiration for future generations. There is in it enough spiritual force to provide the inmost soul of future drama — to supply the basic fabric upon which that drama will be built up, so that dramatists for years to come will patiently reap where Shaw has sown, expatiating, enlarging upon and elaborating his primary inspirations. Take, for example, the following passage from *Man and Superman*, which enunciates the philosophic principle underlying all Shavian drama: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

Bernard Shaw

Look for a moment at Bernard Shaw's plays as a protest against conventionalism and the employment of obsolete ideas in drama. Can it be denied that his revolt against romance (romance which had degenerated into a mere fetish instead of being a living inspiration, as with Shakespear) has done the very best thing that could be done for drama, that is to say, has set the dramatic form free to find its own path, to evolve according to its own inner necessity? Cashel Byron, in *The Admirable Bashville*, voices precisely one's feeling about the drama which Shaw has superseded. "O God, let me be natural a moment!" The solution of the whole problem lies in the fact that the Shakespearean epoch — the epoch of Romance — is at an end. Bernard Shaw is the prophet of the new era — the era of Reality: but, as usual, we take a long while to become accustomed to the change.

But it is on this very account — because his ideas are new — that so many people object to Shaw, and dub his philosophy destructive. Ideas are not necessarily de-

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structive because they are new. They will in their turn become old, and meanwhile they have prepared the way for other and far-reaching truths — they have let in light for us to see the new truths by. There is no need for anyone to take up a superior attitude towards those who do not at present appreciate Bernard Shaw. Many to-day are on the borderland of doing so: and Undershaft rightly interprets their state of mind when he says to Major Barbara: "You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something."

Finally, I would urge that if the Shavian genius is partly destructive, this is a virtue in it, and not a defect. Only by an infusion of new truth can the world progress: and destruction alone can prepare the way for the coming of the new truth. So Tanner in Man and Superman:—

ANN [bored]: I am afraid I am too feminine to see any sense in destruction. Destruction can only destroy.

TANNER: Yes. That is why it is so useful. Construction cumbers the ground with institutions made by busy-bodies. Destruction clears it, and gives us breathing space and liberty.

Bernard Shaw

The would-be worshippers of Construction will doubtless dub this passage an-archical. I therefore insert here a few authoritative words which are to the point in this connection.

"There is a prevalent idea that the constructive genius is in itself something grander than the critical, even though the former turns out to have merely made a symmetrical rubbish heap in the middle of the road of science which the latter has to clear away before anybody can get forward."* These words apply with special force to Shaw's position in the world of dramatic literature to-day.

Finally, I contend that the genius of Bernard Shaw is ultimately constructive. For proof, turn to the second act of Cæsar and Cleopatra: by his own words he is justified.

The Library of Alexandria is in flames.

THEODOTUS [kneeling, with genuine literary emotion: the passion of the pedant]: Cæsar: once in ten generations of men, the world gains an immortal book.

* Huxley's "Method and Results."

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CÆSAR [inflexible]: If it did not flatter mankind, the common executioner would burn it.

THEODOTUS: Without history, death will lay you beside your meanest soldier.

CÆSAR: Death will do that in any case. I ask no better grave.

THEODOTUS: What is burning there is the memory of mankind.

CÆSAR: A shameful memory. Let it burn.

THEODOTUS [wildly]: Will you destroy the past?

CÆSAR: Ay, and build the future with its ruins.

Chapter VII

The Function of Bernard Shaw

"We are led to believe a lie
When we see *with* not *through* the eye,
Which was born in a night to perish in a night
When the soul slept in beams of light."

WILLIAM BLAKE.

BLAKE and Shaw, so dissimilar from the merely external point of view, are entirely at one on the mystical plane. Shaw has drawn public attention to the sympathy which exists between them: but the subject may be pursued a little further with advantage.

The artist-mystic (or the artist-philosopher: the terms are interchangeable, for it has been well said that the mystic has the root of philosophy in him) — the artist-mystic is the greatest of seers, the most mighty of all the creators of mind. He

Function of Bernard Shaw

ploughs the soil of thought: the artists who follow him in the same epoch do but reap where he has sown. The distinction between the artist and the artist-mystic is made clear in the case of Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Dubedat was an artist, a genius, but "a rascally genius." Lest anyone should be tempted, however, in a rash moment, to under-estimate his work I shall quote here his beautiful profession of faith, at once an inspiration and a prophecy. "I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt, in the might of design, in the mystery of color, in the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen."

It is customary to consider Bernard Shaw primarily as a philosopher and to depreciate his talent as an artist, if not to deny him all artistic talent whatsoever. This judgment is a mistaken one. His artistic apprehension is singularly acute, and the evidence of this is writ large over all his plays. The primary demand

Bernard Shaw

which we make of the artist is, that he shall feed the human soul through the channel of æsthetic beauty. Beauty shall clothe his work as it were with a garment. To the artist pure and simple, indeed, beauty is in itself satisfying enough. To Keats, dying in his early noon, it so seemed:—

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

And again:—

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.

Yet we see even here, that Keats was rapidly developing from the point of view of the artist pure and simple, to that of an artist-mystic of a very high order.

But the Shavian conception of the rela-

Function of Bernard Shaw

tion which exists between beauty and philosophy is far more positive than that indicated in the lines quoted above. Bernard Shaw formulated it in a lecture which he delivered in the City Temple in October, 1908.

"Great artists," he said, "in order to get a hearing, have to fascinate their hearers; they have to provide a garment of almost supernatural beauty for the message they have to deliver. Therefore, he (the artist) becomes a master of rhetoric which affects you like music." * That is to say, the function of beauty in art is to secure an audience for its philosophy. One might go a step further here, and add, finally, that the union of truth (or philosophy) and beauty in art is a mystery, as the poets have clearly perceived, from Spenser and Shakespear in the sixteenth century to Keats in the nineteenth. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

In considering Bernard Shaw as a philosopher I should like to draw attention

* As reported in *The Christian Commonwealth*.

Bernard Shaw

to his curative power. He does not wallow in the miseries which constitute the social problem of to-day. In a manner which can only be compared to that of the finest artist-philosophers — Blake, for example, and Bunyan — he states the whole case concisely, and presents the problem in so unmistakable a fashion that it can no longer be “hedged” or evaded in any way. “The Truth,” says William Blake, “can never be told so as to be understood and not be believed.” It is impossible to read the *Unpleasant Plays* and to remain unmoved by an urgent sense of social sin.

But observe his method of dealing with “the sins of society.”* Contrast with it that of so many modern authors, who linger morbidly over the symptoms of disease in our social system, and being powerless to suggest a cure, leave the reader or spectator in a state of mind bordering on despair. Take, for example, a play called *Links*, translated from the Dutch, and recently presented by the Stage Society.

* Taking the phrase in its widest application, of course; using the word “society” to imply the whole social system.

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The play is distinctly clever, and it was acted to admiration, especially by Mr. Fisher White, to whom it afforded a valuable opportunity. But Christian's feelings in the Slough of Despond must have been tepid compared with those of the unfortunate playgoer who stumbled, half blind with horror, out of that Sunday-evening performance of Links.

The ultimate cause of Bernard Shaw's superiority in this direction is to be found in his humour, using the word in the highest sense of which it is capable.

"Let us not forget," says the Bishop of Chelsea, "that humour is a divine attribute." I would go further, and would say that humour, as I am about to define it, is the divinest of all attributes. By humour, here, I mean the comedic sense: preoccupation with life, not death; with salvation, not sin; with a joyful faith in the ultimate achievement of God, not with despair. In spite of all the disease-symptoms which Bernard Shaw observes in Society, and has depicted for us with an accuracy so relentless and so terrible

Bernard Shaw

that he has spared neither himself nor us; in face, I repeat, of the direst of these symptoms, his head is yet held high, his courage is unfailing, his inspiration remains supreme. It is the greatest of his distinctions, that he is always on the side of the forces of life as opposed to the forces of death: in short, that he *believes in life*. If this one fact about him has been made clear, this book will not have been written in vain.

THE END

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